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ABSTRACT

This study examined the opinions of 170 Turkish elementary students in grades 6-8 about what makes a good teacher. Students completed surveys that asked about how they would describe a good teacher, what a teacher should do to be good, and what they would do and would not do if they were good teachers. Questions were open-ended to elicit student opinions. Data analysis found that three major themes emerged from the responses. The most prevalent theme throughout the comments related to teacher-student relationships. Beating was the most frequently mentioned topic within the teacher-student relationship. The second most frequently mentioned theme was teacher personality (e.g., kindness and friendliness). The most common definition statements related to instruction included teaching well and at students' levels, explaining subject matter clearly, repeating subject matter when necessary, answering and encouraging questions, asking student opinions, teaching new ideas and useful skills, focusing on the lesson, asking easy questions in exams, not giving too much homework, giving breaks, and making lessons fun. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

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OPINIONS OF UPPER ELEMENTARY STUDENTS ABOUT A "GOOD TEACHER" (CASE STUDY IN TURKEY)

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OPINIONS OF UPPER LEVEL ELEMENTARY STUDENTS ABOUT A "GOOD TEACHER"

Introduction

Researchers and practitioners have spent considerable time examining teacher personalities, traits, behaviors, attitudes, abilities, competencies, effectiveness, teaching styles, relations with parents and students and many other characteristics to determine what makes a "good teacher". Researcher, fellow teachers, parents, administrators, and supervisors have created lists with these characteristics of teachers. When each of these groups evaluate teachers, they use measuring different instruments, including checklists, personality tests, attitudinal scales, or observation instruments. Researchers have also studied student perceptions of effective teacher characteristics and effective teacher behaviors. As Weinstein (1983) notes " we have turned to the student to help answer some questions about specific classroom effects that have defined resolution within existing frameworks."(p.289).

Since administrators are the main source for evaluating teachers in Turkey student perceptions of effective or good teacher characteristics have rarely been studied. In other words, there is still need to examine the concept of good teacher from the perspective of students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine upper elementary level students' opinions regarding a "good teacher".

Rationale

Because of several reasons, such as insufficient number of secondary schools in rural areas and low economic income rate of families, there is high dropout rate after

compulsory education in Turkey. Therefore, elementary education has an important role in the lives of people. For this reason, it is important to examine student perceptions, attitudes and opinions about schooling and teachers to make these level of education more meaningful for students. As Gozutok(1997) states:

> Basic education is an educational level at which individuals are prepared for their future duties and responsibilities. At this education level individuals acquire the bases for being democratic and contemporary citizens knowledge, skills, and values acquired at the basic education influence the future life of individuals. The relationship between the child and his teacher affects both his future success and his social relations(p.1).

If the teacher affects both students' future success and social relations, we have to listen to students so as to provide a promising future. Therefore, the rationale for this study is to take the perspective of the student to examine what kind of a person the teacher should be and what characteristics the teacher should posses. Moreover, in Turkey pre-service teacher training programs and the structure of teacher education colleges has been redesigned to meet the country's need for qualified teachers. Exploring the students' opinions about "good teachers" can provide teacher trainers with information about characteristics of good teachers. In this way, they can develop appropriate prepatory programs for training good teachers.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore upper elementary students' opinions regarding a "good teacher". Based on this purpose, the problem of this study is defined

as what do elementary students think a good teacher is? A second purpose of this study is to examine students' responses according to gender, in order to determine the frequency of responses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of a "Good Teacher"

Who is a good teacher or bad teacher? What makes teachers effective or ineffective? What are the characteristics of effective teacher? Literature suggests that there is no easy answer to these questions. In a 1975 article, Thomas discusses the difficulty in defining who are good teachers and point out that "a good teacher is one that teaches well, much as a good surgeon operates with skill. What makes a good teacher or a bad poet or a good surgeon only the stars know; and they are not, as yet, willing to tell us the secret."

On the other hand, Borich (1996) argued that it was easy to identify a good teacher in the past. He asserts that:

> If you grown up a century ago, you would have been able to answer " What is an effective teacher? very simple: A good teacher was a good person- a role model who met the community ideal for good citizen, good parent, and good employee. At that time teachers were judged primary on their goodness as people and only secondarily on their behavior in the classroom. They were expected to be honest, hardworking, generous, friendly, and considerate, and to demonstrate these qualities in their classrooms by being authoritative, organized, disciplined, insightful, and dedicated (p.2).

It can be said that defining good or effective teachers can change from time to time and from person to person. In her study Gozutok(19970 supports this idea and points out that there are different ideas as to who is a good teacher and how teachers should be good. She also stresses that behaviors and characteristics of teachers can change regarding the teaching models and philosophy of these models that applied by the teacher. Moreover, Gudmundsdottir and Saabar (1991) suggest that goodness in teaching and descriptions of good teacher are culturally embedded. They explain that in China, good teachers are described as virtuosos because their art is teaching and there is little variation in teaching. In England, the good teacher is a superman who needs to have exceptional personal qualities, supper command of pedagogical skill, exceptional subject matter background and faultless conduct. Good teachers in the United State are artists who base their art on solid craft knowledge and bold imagination, and because they are improvisers on stage, sensitive to the responses of their audiences. The good teacher in Israel is creator of the nation with the responsibility for transmitting cultural knowledge to the younger generation. By contrast good teachers in Norway are looked upon as caregivers and interpreters of text. At this point it should be mentioned that in the literature there is no clear distinction between the concepts " good teacher" and effective teacher. Therefore, in this study these concepts are used interchangeably.

Although definition of a good teacher is not clear, some characteristics of effective teachers have been cited in the literature. In his study Hamachek(1975) mentioned that students preferred teachers who were "helpful in school work, who explained lesson and assignments clearly, who used examples in teaching, and who had a sense of humor" (p.240). Shedlin(1986) concluded that best teachers have the following

characteristics: respect for children, sense of humor, demanding expectations, flexible firmness, enthusiasm and resourcefulness, cross-curricular teaching, making learning useful, willingness to listen (p.53).

Similarly, Chapmen, Doak & Ogden (1994) summarized some effective teacher characteristics which have been cited in the literature. These characteristics include: adaptable, caring, collaborative, committed, confident, creative, dedicated, demanding, energetic, persistent, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, emotionally stable, motivated, flexible, friendly, organized, patient, sensitive, listener, tolerant (p.6).

Teacher Effectiveness

It is clear in the literature that researcher and practitioners studying teachers and teaching have spent considerable effort to determine teacher effectiveness by using different methods, sources and approaches. King (1981) states that " the more research on teaching that is done, the more it is becoming evident that there is no single way to be a good teacher."

In a 1986 article Boric discusses about the six paradigms of teacher effectiveness research:

- process-anecdotal
- process-systematic
- process-product
- experimental
- process-process
- process-process-product (p.145-158).

He explains that "each of these paradigms has occupied a place in history and each has had its supporter as well as critics" (p.143). In addition, Borich also explains that both in the process-anecdotal and the process-systematic paradigm teachers, were identified as a good person but not as a good teacher.

Specifically concerning the process-product approach, Borich (1986), Rosenshine (1983), and Good (1983) suggest that an effective teacher is who praises pupils, uses pupil ideas, lectures, provides feedback, ask questions, focuses on academic goals, furnishes opportunities for controlled practice with feedback, explains concepts and procedures, promotes meaning and purpose for academic work and monitors comprehension.

Richardson & Thomas (1989) explain that besides these paradigms, specific models of teaching have also been used to determine teacher effectiveness. These models include information processing, therapeutic models. They conclude that " model builders perceive an effective teacher as one who enacts a preferred model adequately" (p.4).

Literature suggests that despite all these activities, research findings on teacher effectiveness are inconsistent and that problems exist in that research area (Ornstein, 1986; Benninga, Thonburg & Guskey (1980). Berliner (1976) groups the problems into three categories: instrumentation, methodology, and statistics used in studying haw teachers affect the achievement of students (p.5-12).

Student Perceptions and Concepts of Teachers

To examine teacher effectiveness, researcher have also analyzed student ratings of teacher effectiveness, or students have been asked to rate the variables used in such

studies to yield their perception of the characteristics of good teachers (e.g., Symonds, 1955; Weinstein, Marshall, Brattesani & Middlestadt 1982; Driscoll, Peterson, Crow & Larson 1985; Margendoller and Packer, 1985; Benninga et al., 1980; Gorham, 1988; Lobonti and Danielson, 1988; Prater, Rezzonico, Pyron, Chischille, Arthur, & Yellowhair, 1995; Richardson et al., 1989; Noerllinger, 1987). These researchers have concluded that sufficient evidence exists to warrant use of group instrument to measure student perception of teachers at primary and elementary level.

However, a specific question raised in the literature about drawing evaluative data from young students has focused on whether young students can accurately perceive or report on teacher effectiveness. The literature suggests that there are some pros and cons of using students' ratings. Amotora (1954) outlines them below:

Pros of using student ratings:

1. Students are frank in their opinions of their teachers
2. Students do express their attitudes and sentiments to others
3. Students see their teachers daily, in both good and adverse circumstances
4. Students criticism may acquaint the teacher with hitherto unknown undesirable qualities
5. Student ratings one easy, convenient, and economical way for a teacher to see himself as he is daily mirrored before his class (p.150).

Cons of using student ratings

1. Students are too immature to give valid judgements
2. The halo effects offsets any possible validity
3. Anonymous rating serve to encourage exhibitionism

4. Student responses are influenced by grades, teacher attitudes, and the like

5. Teacher morale is lowered when students are permitted to do the rating (p.149).

In her study Amotora (1954) also concluded that elementary level students are quite stable in their ratings of students and show a satisfactory degree of agreement and discrimination. Weinstain (1983) reviewed the literature on student perception and asserts " despite age differences, students' view of good teacher were quite similar (based on similar criteria), except that the young children, compared with college students defined feedback about good performance as a more important quality of good teaching."(p.290). Similarly in his review of literature, Follman (1995) summarizes that:

> An adequate psychometric research base of pupil rating research exist to enable the following generalizations: (a) Elementary pupils, including preschoolers as young as four years of age, can rate reliably. (b) While elementary pupils are vulnerable to rating leniency and halo, the holistic problems of rating scales, they may not be greatly more vulnerable than other rating groups, that is, high school students, college students...(c) Psychometric characteristics of elementary pupil rating scales tend to be similar to psychometric characteristics of college student rating scales, in so far as the limited research base allows generalization. Finally, it is concluded that the relevant elementary pupil rating research does justify the use of elementary pupil ratings as one of several criteria in a professional teacher evaluation program, especially involving staff differentiation, merit pay, and the career ladder...(p.73-74).

Literature shows that there are various sources, methods, and paradigms to evaluate teacher effectiveness, goodness, behaviors, and many other characteristics. Although the issue of accuracy in student perception and ratings is often argued among researchers, students as young as those within primary leves have been seen as one of several evaluative criteria for determining the characteristics of good/effective teachers.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects of this study were sixth, seventh, and eighth grade elementary students at an elementary school in Ankara and an elementary school in Kayseri, Turkey. The school, located in Ankara, serves the students from the first to eight grades and enrolls around 1,825 students. The school, located in Kayseri, serves the students from first to eight grades and enrolls around 1,850.

In this study, a total of 170 students, including 75 females and 95 males were surveyed. The sample included 33 sixth grade, 77 seventh grade, and 60 eighth grade students. One entire class at grade level six, seven, and eight from the school in Ankara and one entire class at grade level seven and eight from the school in Kayseri were selected for this study. Table 1 shows the distribution of students according to their grade level and gender.

Table 1

Distribution of students according to their grade level and gender.

GRADE / GENDER	SIX	SEVEN	EIGHT	TOTAL	%
FEMALE	14	35	26	75	44
MALE	19	42	34	95	56
TOTAL	33	77	60	170	100
%	20	45	35	100	

Data Collection

A survey was conducted to investigate student opinions about characteristics of a "good teacher". The survey was developed by the researcher and reviewed by some professors in Turkey. The survey consisted of background questions such as students gender and grade level and the following open-ended questions:

1. How do you describe a good teacher?
2. What do you think a teacher should do in order to be a good teacher?
3. If you were a teacher, what would you do in the classroom in order to be a good teacher?
4. If you were a teacher, what wouldn't you do in the classroom?

In order to elicit student opinions, the questions were intentionally designed as

open-ended. Before distributing of the survey, the students were told that the study will explore what they think a good teacher is. They were instructed to not write any teacher's names and their own names on the survey. The questions were then read aloud to all students in order to make them be clear about each question and each student wrote their own responses directly on the survey. They were given enough time to answer the questions.

Data Analysis

In order to provide a detailed description of the data content analysis technique was used. A combination of words, concepts, and sentences were count as a content unit in the study.

Student responses for each question were printed on 3×5 cards. In order to identify varios themes, students common and discrepant responses were sorted out. To determine the importance of each theme, the themes were further evaluated for frequency. Student responses for each theme were also evaluated by their gender.

FINDINGS

Three major themes emerged from the sorted common responses: Instruction, Teacher

Chart 1. Frequency of responses in each theme

Personality, and Student/Teacher Relationship. Chart 1 shows the frequency of the responses falling into each of the three themes.

A number of results were revealed from this chart:

1. The frequency of student responses showed that a relationship formulated between teacher and students was seen as most important for being a good teacher.
2. The students' responses indicated that the personality of a teacher was seen as second important characteristics in determining if a teacher was good.
3. The third important characteristic in a good teacher cited by the students was related to instruction carried out by a teacher.

In order to determine whether gender's view of a good teacher's characteristics differ student responses were further evaluated by gender. Table 2 shows the frequency of responses falling into each of the theme by gender of the students. The frequency of responses in each theme reflected that male students asserted in each theme more than female students.

Table 2

Frequency of responses in each three theme by students' gender

GENDER / THEMES	FEMALE		MALE		TOTAL	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Relationship	379	46	448	54	827	100
Personality	144	45	178	55	322	100
Instruction	150	49	57	51	307	100

Student/Teacher Relationship

The most prevalent theme throughout the comments of the students was that regarding student/teacher relationship. Students most frequently identified a good teacher with the following characteristics that a good teacher:

- Does not beat.
- Does not yell.
- Does not humiliate.
- Acts like a parent to students.
- Acts like a friend to students.
- Loves students.
- Treats all students well.
- Treats all students equally.
- Shares students' problems, concerns, and joys.
- Willing to listen students.
- Interested in each students individually.

Beating was most frequently mentioned in the teacher/student relationship and students often underlined or used quotation marks for the statement like "a good teacher never beats". Many students also noted that good teachers do not beat or yell unnecessarily, as soon as they enter the classroom or just because they want. According to students responses, good teachers warn students instead of beating. Some students explained that good teachers are always ready to act as a friend or parent, and loving students as much as their own child. Students viewed that good teachers treat all students

well and equal, regardless of their achievement level, economic level, or gender. In the students' eyes, good teachers are concerned with student problem. They share and listen both to students' problems and joys. A few of the comments as follows:

" If I were a teacher I would never beat. I would never be more formal. When they have a problem and want to tell the problem to me I would newer say ' tell your problem to someone else' or ' I do not work here to listen others' problem' (eight grade, female).

" I think a good teacher never beats students. Instead of beating a good teacher praises students" (sixth grade, male).

" I think if teachers beat a student in front of his/her friends or others and say " 'you are stupid and you never study', they are not good teachers. Because the student feels embarrassed and disgraced and later his friends tell him bad things." (sixth grade, female).

" A good teacher treats us like our father and never beats, gives advise." (seventh grade, male).

" I think a good teacher does not beat hard and unnecessarily treats, and loves all students equal, it is not good to say I love you more than others because you are hardworking" (seventh grade, male).

Teacher Personality

The teacher's personality was the second most frequently reported theme by the students. Good teachers were identified with the following personality characteristics: kindness, friendliness, honesty, tolerance, helpfulness, patience, as well as not being

nervous, not angry.

Some students associated tolerance with instruction, such as being tolerant when teaching, tolerant if students ask same question more than one time, and if students do not answer questions, some others associated tolerance with classroom management, such as tolerance for misbehaving students, tolerance for students who are late for class, and tolerance for students who forget to bring their textbooks or other materials.

Similarly, students associated helpfulness with instruction, such as helping to understand the subject matter or slow-learners. Others associated helpfulness with a relationship, such as helping a student's psychological or economic problems. Many students mentioned that good teachers are always friendly.If a teacher is nervous, angry, grouchy or mad all the time they are not good. In contrast, some students noted that teachers should not be too kind and close to students and should not spoil students because students can misbehave quickly. Selected responses related to teacher personality include:

" I think a good teacher is not nervous and saucy during lesson time" (eight grade, male).

" In my opinion a good teacher is tolerant if students do not do homework and tries to understand reason" (seventh grade, male).

" I think a good teacher is friendly, honest and gives importance to education" (eight grade, male).

" I think a good teacher never beats, is friendly and tolerant. I want teachers to not use slang and they should be interested in students' likes and dislikes" (eight grade, male).

"If I don't understand subject matter my teachers help me to understand and they are good" (sixth grade, female).

Instruction

The most common definition statement related to instruction included the following:

- Teaches well.
- Teaches at students level.
- Explains subject matter clearly.
- Explains lesson until students understand.
- Repeats subject matter when needed.
- Answers students' questions.
- Encourages to ask questions.
- Asks students' ideas and opinions.
- Teaches useful skills.
- Teaches new ideas and gives new information.
- Focuses on lesson.
- Asks easy questions in exams.
- Not gives too much and difficult homework.
- Gives break during lesson time.
- Makes lesson fun.

Although the statement that a teacher "teaches well" is not clear, most students identified good teachers regarding clarity of explanations. Students believed that good teachers communicate clearly and directly to their students without explaining things

beyond students' level of comprehensive. Most students mentioned that good teachers make jokes, tell stories, play with students, make interesting things to take students' attention to the subject matter. Some students noted that good teachers also focus on lessons instead of doing unnecessary things, such as talking about politics, reading newspapers, and smoking.

According to students, good teachers ask what students think about the subject matter and discuss subject matter with them. Several students mentioned again that good teachers teach study skills for future life such as the way of effective listening, learning themselves, obtaining new information, taking notes, and studying for exams.

Some students believed that a good teacher asks easy questions in oral and written exams and is fair in grading. Examples of specific responses are as follows:

" Sometimes we don't understand subject matter but we are shy to ask therefore a good teacher is a person who explain lesson well" (eight grade, female).

" If students' does not understand lesson teachers should explain it again without being angry" (eight grade, male).

" For example if students raise their hand to ask a question related to subject matter teachers should not be angry, and should correct students' mistake, do exercises together" sixth grade, male).

" A good teacher does not gives a fish but teaches us how to fish" (eight grade, male).

" For example, if a students ask a question a good teacher never say I have answered your question just a few minutes ago, why you didn't listen to me" (seventh grade, female).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, the students have provided us with many clearly defined characteristics that they believe to be important in determining whether a teacher is a good teacher. Although there were little individual opinions the overall results of the study suggest agreement among students with respect to the characteristics of a good teacher.

The opinions of the students are consistent with other research results in the field. For example in their study Buckner and Bickel (1991) found that two-thirds of the students identified excellent teacher as those who are willing to listen, are respectful toward students, accept students, are easy to talk with, demonstrate warmth and kindness, are friendly, really know the subjects they teach, check to make sure that all students understand, are fair when grading, are aware that some students need extra help, and take more time for those who need it when explaining things. Likewise, the Mood of American Youht, published by NASSP, reported the results of the survey and compared the attitudes young people with those of their 1974 and 1983 counterparts. The study revealed that approximately two-thirds of students believed that good teachers explain things clearly and spend time to help students. Other important characteristics mentioned by at least half the students included being fair to their students, treating their students like adults, relating well to students, and being considerate of students' feelings (Schools in the Middle, 1996). In her study, Gorham(1987) found that "most common in the discussion of instruction were comments regarding homework"(p.13). In contrast students made fewer comments about homework in this study. This difference may be

attributed to the different countries' own educational policy. Similar to the Mergendeller & Packer's (1985) conclusion, students not only did simply described a good teacher but they also made valuable comments about their expectations and needs in this study.

The students most frequently mentioned that the relationship established between teachers and students and teachers behaviors toward students determined whether a teacher was a "good teacher". Almost every student used the statement " a good teacher does not beat hard" in her/his comments. Although physical punishment has been abolished in Turkey Educational system for a long time student responses may be concluded that teachers still apply physical punishment or strict discipline techniques in their classroom. Student responses reflect that they want teachers to treat them as human beings with emotions and feelings. Students viewed that being able talk personally with each students and share their problems or joys is important characteristic of a good teacher.

Although the frequency of responses in each theme reflected that males commented in each theme more than females there were not any noticeable discrepancies between genders. This result leads to the conclusion that gender does not seem to influence students' view of good teacher characteristics.

The information gained from students' opinions regarding good teacher characteristics suggests that teachers should develop mutual respect toward students and show an understanding of their problems, concerns, and needs. Therefore, development of personal qualities should be an important aspects of preservice and incervice teacher education programs as well as development of competencies in the skills of instruction. This study would be missing to test what really works for students in the teaching, how

they really identify their teachers, what they really want to say about their teachers. Therefore, in order to make definitive conclusions future studies should be done in various school environment applying different research methods including interview, surveys.

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